WATER ALLOCATION PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
IMPACT SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

MINUTES OF MEETNG
2-10-03 2:30 PM at the Offices of the RI Economic Policy Council

Next meeting of subcommittee: February 10 at 2:30 AM (same place)

Present:
Kathy Crowley, Beth Collins, Ana Semedo, Rich Blodgett, Russ Chateneauf, Katherine Wallace, Julie Lungren, Christine Lipsky, Herb Johnston, and Michael Sullivan

1. Changes in Committee Membership
Ana Semedo, a graduate student in planning at URI is staffing this project at the Policy Council
Rich Blodgett is now the subcommittee second (Scott Millar resigned)
Paul Jamrog of the Metacomet Golf Club has joined the subcommittee

2. Briefing on Richmond Commons – W. Michael Sullivan, Richmond Town Council President and Herb Johnson, consulting hydrologist

The Richmond Commons proposal involves about 500 acres of land close to I-95 which will be zoned in a gradient from industries to residential. The design specifications are to discourage Rt. 2 style sprawl with curb cuts for every business.

The site has a number of pre-existing uses including housing, 3 landfills, a dairy farm, an elementary school.

Ground water flow is away from the site in both NW and SE directions with DEM's largest fish hatchery lying to the SE. The hatchery is one of the most sensitive uses to water quality.

The Planned Unit Development Village Center (PUDVC) is designed to create a coherent community center with

- "flex tech" corporate / industrial park
- 500 units of age-restricted housing for people 55 and up (200 in phase I), including congregate care, condos, minimum unit cost $250,000
- professional office uses
- 3 entrances to an internal road system (to avoid Warwick habitat)
- 14 miles of roads and new water infrastructure to be built by private developer

This project is driven by Richmond's fiscal need to grow the tax base without adding significantly to school costs. The age restriction for all the planned housing will minimize new children attending school. The build out estimate is 20 to 25 years. The estimated total value is $350 million.

Richmond has a Growth Management Ordinance that permits 36 homes a year. The ordnance has been challenged in court and survives.

Typically every 240 new single family homes = 500 new school-age children = a new school

Currently the area has excess water supply, but insufficient pressure to serve the proposed development. The system has a 600,000 gal tank, a well and a back-up well that supply 800,000 gallons a day. They need a new well field and a new tower. The water system was built by the Water Resource Board because local wells had been contaminated by a gas station. It was sold to the town.

Environmental concerns on the property include a rare and endangered dragonfly (National Heritage Program) that requires a 150 setback instead of the 50 ft required for the wetland alone; an EPA designated sole-source aquifer; a vernal pool and other vulnerable wetland systems.

The area is not sewered. The Planning board has specified that the wastewater treatment facilities for the site meet 50% of the specified design standard – meaning that only half as many particles of pollutants can be found at the edge of the system as the basic design standard allows. Paul adds that he is proud of the Council for taking this position which will add somewhat to the engineering costs. Executing this will require profound communication between the town and DEM.

The estimated discharge of the project is 400,000 gallons a day. Keeping wastewater on site relieves some of the environmental issues.

They are looking for an opportunity to re-use the gray water from the development. A golf course is a prime candidate. Richmond likes golf courses. It has 5 that pay $30,000 a year in taxes and don't add to school costs.

Richmond is lining up economic incentives to accelerate the development of industry. The site was granted State Enterprise Zone status and Richmond is seeking the authority to execute local tax treaties. Richmond does not have a town charter so it has to ask for powers from the legislature.

Discussion:

Russ: This is a wastewater system of unprecedented size. The trend has been toward larger systems. The red flag issue is deciding how to manage the system. Who will have responsibility? I'm inclined to municipal responsibility so that management is open record. The town can partner with the private sector.

Herb: With the 2.5 m.g.d. potential from the aquifer, the area is valuable as a water supply. Still, it is easily possible to exceed water supply to the point that streams are drained as is happening at URI with the Chipuxet.

There are two major water impacts that can come from a big development: stream depletion and changes in water quality. The key to managing these impacts is returning water to the ground through septic systems. This project will return 85% of water to the ground.

It is possible to have water quality impacts that leave the water good to drink, but still have negative impacts on habitat. The fish hatchery is a good example.

Does this development relieve development pressure elsewhere in Richmond? Michael says: Yes and No. The senior housing will spur some house recycling.

Other issues touched upon

- Regulation, litigation, and non-regulatory approaches to anticipate and mitigate conflicts as ways to solve water disputes
- the right to farm vs. the demands of housing
- older developments have water supply and treatment issues too
- 8 low-moderate income duplexes were built in a location with insufficient wells. If low-income housing isn't explicitly planned for, it can occur in unsuitable locations because the town has less of ability to deny permits.
- Lawn fertilizers are totally unregulated
- Most wells have impact on streams within 10 days by 80%
- There is a lot of water in RI; A lot of it is compromised; Much of it would become usable if adequately treated.
- In Blackstone we drink Worcester's waste.

3. Other new findings

Ana Semedo is compiling the safe yield water supply numbers.

4. Tasks, deliverables, and assignments

DEM and Nature Conservancy committee members are working on compiling identified priority environmental areas.

The task list needs cleaning up. Beth and Ana will take a stab at it and circulate the new list for input. We plan to get everyone an assignment this month.

5. Set next meeting: March 7, 2003 2:30

Possible speaker, Robert Costanza of the Gund Institute of Ecological Economics, U of Vermont http://www.uvm.edu/giee/